

JOHN MARION PRIOUR

BY FREDERIC H. KENNARD

John Marion Priour died March 14, 1931, at Corpus Christi, Texas. While never a member of the American Ornithologists Union, he had been so closely identified with a number of the ornithologists of this country, as guide, camping companion, or collector, that some notice should be taken of his passing.

His father, Gene M. Priour, was born in Rennes, France, in 1812, and came to this country in 1836, landing at Mobile, Alabama. His mother, Rosalie B. Hart, was born in Wexford County, Ireland, in 1825, and brought to this country by her parents in 1834, with a party of colonists, who landed at Copano Bay, a few miles north of Corpus Christi. Her father having died of cholera, contracted on the ship, she was taken by her mother, after various adventures, to Mobile, Alabama, where she was educated, and later met and married Gene M. Priour in 1844.

John Marion Priour was born in Mobile, Alabama, March 3, 1848; and in 1851, according to his own account, "was brought to Texas and landed on the beach at Corpus Christi Bay." Here his family settled and young Priour, growing up (there were seven brothers and sisters) in what was then a frontier town, seems to have turned his hand to various pursuits.

Starting at the age of nineteen as a clerk in a grocery and dry-goods store in Corpus Christi, he later spent a couple of years in his employer's interests in Mexico, whence he returned to take charge of his father's ranch on the Aransas River.

For the next few years he seems to have led the frontier life of those days, looking after his father's ranch, driving cattle to market, sometimes to Louisiana; and writes that he "was with the Volunteer Rangers six years at the time our pistols were the law, judge, and jury". At one time he worked as engineer on a new railroad that had just been built from Corpus Christi to Laredo, and then learned the trade of carpentry.

On October 1, 1877, on one of his trips to Louisiana, he married Margaret Elida Wanning, of Morgan City, Louisiana, daughter of Horatio and Ora Wanning, and brought her back to Corpus Christi, near which they made their home. Mrs. Priour died on September 10, 1916. They are survived by one son, John W. Priour of Hebbronville, Texas, and two daughters, Mrs. J. W. Roark of Corpus Christi, and Mrs. J. W. Cunningham of Callalen, Texas.

While Priour was a born hunter and outdoor man, he never seems to have been particularly interested in the birds or mammals around him, at least as a collector, until he was over thirty years old and happened to meet Col. N. S. Goss of Neosho Falls, Kansas. Dr.



FIG. 48. John Marion Priour. 1848-1931.

Frank M. Chapman, who collected with Priour in 1891, quotes an account of this meeting from his "Journal" of March 16 of that year:

"Some morning in 1878 a man who requested a drink walked into Priour's yard with a Caracara and a Marsh Hawk flung over his shoulder. To a hunter these birds were as Vultures, and he commenced to play on the supposed ignorance of his caller, saying, 'You

have some fine soup birds there.' Goss took it in his calm manner, and after awhile, seeing that Priour was really interested, explained why he was shooting such apparently worthless birds. Then Priour told him of birds he had seen, and this led to his engagement as guide."

Just when young Priour learned to stuff birds, and began to collect them and their eggs is not known, but this friendship with Col. Goss, begun so accidentally, seems to have been kept up, and Priour writes that "in 1881, Col. N. S. Goss, of Neosho Falls came to Corpus and we collected and mounted quite a lot of specimens".

In 1882 Col. Goss's brother, Captain B. F. Goss of Pewaukee, Wisconsin, came to Corpus Christi, and was there joined by George B. Sennett, and Priour writes that "we collected from the Rio Grande to the mouth of the Gaudalupe River", and he continued to collect eggs either with Captain Goss, or for him, until 1886, and collected skins for Sennett until 1891.

Col. Goss's collection of mounted birds, originally in the Kansas State Capitol, at Topeka, has been transferred to the Museum of the Kansas State Historical Society, at Topeka. Captain Goss's egg collection is in the Milwaukee Public Museum, although he gave a great many eggs to the United States National Museum at Washington. A good many of Sennett's skins are also in Washington; but such skins as he possessed at the time of his death passed to the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

While the thousands of specimens collected by Priour were invariably labelled with such data as was necessary, he seems never to have thought of putting on his own name as collector.

That Sennett thought a lot of Priour is evident, for Dr. J. A. Allen, in his account of Sennett's life, in the *Auk*, January, 1901, writes: "In this same year (1887) he sent Mr. J. M. Priour to the region of the lower Brazos River, and later to explore the coast region, or Tamaulipan district, of northeastern Mexico. Mr. Priour made a wagon trip from Corpus Christi to Tampico in 1888, amassing large collections, which threw much light on the faunal character of this then little known region, and helped to establish the boundaries of the Tamaulipan Fauna. As the country about Tampico proved very unhealthy, Mr. Priour nearly lost his life there from a tropical fever. The next season, 1889, to enable him to recuperate, and to continue his work in a more salubrious region, Mr. Sennett sent him to the eastern base of the Sierra Madre, where for several months he collected in the

vicinity of Monterey. The results of these important expeditions unfortunately still remain unpublished."

This seems to have been a busy decade for Priour, ornithologically speaking. For, in the spring of 1884 he collected with Joseph L. Hancock from March 16 to April 1, and in 1887 with George B. Beners of Philadelphia, and there were a number of others.

Dr. Frank M. Chapman writes: "I lived with John Priour either at his home or with him in camp from March 16 to April 25, 1891. His striking personality, his knowledge of the country, and his enthusiasm as a collector made my month with him stand out as one of the most enjoyable of my collecting experience."

Dr. Witmer Stone writes me that S. N. Rhoads of Philadelphia, "stayed with him about 1891".

In 1894 there was published by the Forest & Stream Publishing Co. an amusing book by Dr. A. C. Pierce of Boston, Mass., entitled, "A Man from Corpus Christi or The Adventures of Two Bird Hunters and a Dog in Texas Bogs". This was a ludicrous account of the travels and adventures of Dr. Pierce with Priour and his dog, Absalom, on a five-months camping and collecting trip in the vicinity of Corpus Christi.

Dr. Pierce writes that "Mr. Priour was a professional hunter; he made hunting his whole business the year around, and as his jaunts extended in every direction, he was well acquainted with the country for miles about Corpus Christi. He also collected specimens of natural history for various parties, and as my principal object in visiting the country was to secure such specimens myself, I could not have found a man better fitted for my companion."

Vernon Bailey writes that "On April 13, 1900, Mrs. Bailey and I first met Priour and his son at Corpus Christi, and he went around with us for several days on trips to the flooded bottoms of the Nueces River to get Wild Turkeys, and down along the coast and Laguna Madre for water and shore birds. He was a taxidermist and skin collector, and had for years been in the business of collecting plumage for the millinery trade with Armstrong, Watson, and others. He had been with many well-known ornithologists and helped them collect, and knew birds fairly well."

"He gave me many notes on mammals that I used in my Texas report, North American Fauna, No. 25, published in 1905, and later sent some specimens of mammals to the Biological Survey. Most of his notes on birds are included in Oberholser's report on the 'Birds of Texas' not yet published. He was a kindly, helpful friend with the

interests and enthusiasm of a real naturalist. His contributions to science in both ornithology and mammalogy were far more important than some of those that get more credit."

From 1900 to 1916, after the trade in plumage had become pretty much a thing of the past, and collectors were becoming rare, Priour seems to have spent most of his time working as a carpenter, either in Corpus Christi, or in other parts of Texas, building oil well derricks or doing his bit during the war by helping on the buildings for the Army Camp at San Antonio.

After Mrs. Priour's death in 1916, he closed his old home and went to live with one of his daughters.

Mr. N. A. Francis of Brookline, Mass., made successive egg collecting trips with Priour in the springs of 1919, 1920, and 1921. Mr. Francis died on June 19, 1921, and his collection was presented later to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, Mass. He had told me so much about Priour and his delightful personality, that, in February, 1922, my son Bob and I, while collecting along the coast of Texas, stopped off at Corpus Christi for the especial purpose of meeting him, and spent five enjoyable days in his company, exploring the country about his daughter's (Mrs. Roark) place where he then lived, about six miles out of Corpus Christi. Together we tramped the shores of the Nueces River, or sailed down the Laguna Madre to Bird and Padre Islands.

I was so charmed by his delightful personality, his youthful enthusiasm, (he was 74 at the time), and above all, by his kindness, that we carried on a somewhat desultory correspondence afterwards, even though the old man hated letter-writing. He gave me at the time a number of skins that he happened to have on hand, and later, after I had gotten the necessary permits for him, collected a few birds for me.

The late Walter B. Savory of Wareham, Mass., seems to have been the last one to have gone camping and egg collecting with him, and he wrote that in the spring of 1927, when Priour was 79 years old, "we collected together for some months, Uncle John going with me in my auto and camping wherever we happened to stop. He gave me all the sets he found. I never ceased to admire the natural-born courtesy that distinguished him. It was a privilege to know him."

Modest, unassuming, generous to a fault, always ready to do anything for anybody at any time, I think it was his kindness that most attracted me, and as an example of this, I would like to tell of one personal incident. It has been the custom, these many years, for my

friends and neighbors to foregather at my home in Massachusetts on New Year's eve. and, together, see the Old Year out and the New Year in. As part of the decorations there is always hanging from a beam in the front hall a sprig of mistletoe. Now mistletoe grows luxuriantly about Corpus Christi, and one day while with Priour, I told him of our custom, and wished that I might have, on these occasions, just such a wonderful clump as we happened to be looking at, to hang in my hall. Nothing further was said about it at the time, and I had forgotten the incident until, a couple of days before New Year's, a large box was received from Texas containing just such a clump of mistletoe. And each year since then, such boxes have arrived. Not only that, but before he died the old man asked his daughter to continue the custom, because I had been his friend.

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ENDEMISM AND THE AMERICAN NORTHWEST

BY T. T. MCCABE

The speculations to which this paper is devoted are based upon the empirical belief that geographic populations of the higher vertebrates are reasonably certain to show endemic variations in proportion to one or more rather vague environmental considerations, such as the homogeneity and individuality of the environment in question, its size, its isolation, or its age. These vague conditions, often more easily perceptible to the casual observer than to the cloistered student of the physical data, somehow actuate or correlate with precise agencies still far beyond our grasp. But throughout the general failure of field ecology as an exact science, especially for land areas, there recurs the stubborn conviction that regions which we empirically sense as natural units are in the vast majority of cases reflected in endemic racial or specific variations of a significant number of the more plastic vertebrate forms. In general, such endemic conformity conveys a sense of distinction from other types of variation of diverse historical or genetic origins. It is the basis of the study of incipient evolutionary change in the higher vertebrates today. So regular is its occurrence that we are justified in emphasizing the fact and seeking an explanation when a striking exception appears. Such considerations may justify a few paragraphs of rather loose descriptive comment on certain areas of northwestern North America whose conformation and recent history throw light upon the nature and rate of cer-